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GERMELSHAUSEN

BY

FRIEDRICH GERSTÄCKER

LITERALLY TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

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GERMELSHAUSEN.

In the autumn of the year 184– a young man, in the prime of life, a knapsack on his back, a stick in his hand, walked slowly and easily along the broad highway which led from Marisfeld up to Wichtelhausen. He was no journeyman, who went from place to place, seeking work; that was to be seen at the first glance at him, if the small finely made leather portfolio, which he carried strapped on his knapsack had not already betrayed him. Altogether the artist could not be mistaken. The broad brimmed black hat set coquettishly on one side, the long, fair curly hair, the soft, short, though full beard—all denoted it, even the somewhat worn black velvet coat which might be, nevertheless, a little too hot for him on this warm morning. He had unbuttoned it, and the white shirt beneath for he wore no waistcoat — was held loosely together about the throat by a black silk handkerchief.

When he was about fifteen minutes walk from Marisfeld, the bells rang for church there, and he stood still leaning on his stick and listening attentively to the deep tones of the bells which were wonderfully re-echoed to him. The sounds had long ceased and still he stood and gazed dreamily out at the hill slopes. His spirit was home again with his own people, in the pleasant little village in the Taunus Mountains, with his mother and his sister, and it almost seemed, as if tears would rise to his eyes. But his light, cheerful heart would not let the sad and melancholy thoughts arise. However, he took off his hat and with a cordial smile, saluted the direction in which he knew his home to be, then

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grasping firmly his stout stick, he walked gaily along the road, resuming his journey.

In the meanwhile, the sun shone pretty warmly on the broad, monotonous road, on which the dust lay in a thick crust, and our traveller had for some time already looked about to right and left to see if he could nowhere discover a more comfortable pathway. Once, to be sure, a way branched off on the right, but it promised him nothing better, and also led too far away from his direction; so he kept to the old one for some time longer, until he at last came to a clear mountain stream, by which he could perceive the ruins of an old stone bridge. Over this ran a grassy path which led into the hollow; however, with no definite aim before him, since he was seeking the beautiful valley of the Nerra only to enrich his portfolio studies, he sprang on great, detached stones, dry-footed, over the brook, upon the close cut meadow beyond, and here on the springy turf and under the shadow of thick alder bushes, walked quickly forward much pleased with his exchange. "Now I have the advantage of not knowing whither I am going. Here stands no tiresome guidepost, that tells one hours before, the name of the next place, and then is always wrong about the distance. I should like to know how the people here mete out their hours. But here in the hollow it is wonderfully quiet,—truly, on Sunday the peasants have nothing to do out of doors, and if during the week they have to run behind the plough or beside the wagon, they don't care much for walking on Sunday; first they sleep away the morning soundly in church, and then after the noon meal stretch their limbs under the inn table. Inn table —hm—a glass of beer now would not be so bad in this heat, bu until I can get that, the clear stream here will quench my thirstt With that he threw off hat and knapsack, bent down to the water and drank to his heart's content. Somewhat cooled by this, his glance fell on an old, wonderfully deformed willow, which with skilled hand he quickly sketched, and now completely refreshed and rested, he took up his knapsack again and set out on his way

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careless whither it led him. Thus he might have wandered about for an hour, collecting in his portfolio, here a piece of rock, there a peculiar alder bush, there again a gnarled branch of oak; the sun, in the meantime, had risen higher and higher, and he was just intending to step out now vigorously, so at least not to lose the dinner in the next village, when he saw before him in the hollow, close by the brook and sitting on an old stone on which earlier perhaps an image of a saint had stood, a peasant girl, who was watching the direction from which he came. Sheltered by the alders, he could see her sooner than she him; but following the bank of the brook, scarcely had he emerged from the bushes, which until then had concealed him from her gaze, when she sprang up and rushed towards him with a cry of joy.

Arnold, as the young artist was called, stopped astonished and soon saw that it was a very lovely maiden of scarcely seventeen years, clothed in a very peculiar, but extremely pretty peasant costume, who, with outstretched arms, flew towards him. Arnold indeed knew that she had at all events, taken him for another and that this joyful greeting was not for him.—The girl no sooner recognized him than she stopped terrified, turned first pale and then redder and redder, and at last said, shyly and confusedly: "Do not take it ill, strange sir—I—I thought—"

"That it was your lover, dear child, didn't you?" laughed the young man, "and now you are vexed that another, a strange and similar man's form crosses your path? Don't be angry that I am not he."

"Oh, how can you talk so," murmured the girl, anxiously; "how could I be angry — but if you knew, how much I had rejoiced over it."

"Then he certainly does not deserve that you should wait any longer for him," said Arnold, who now for the first time was struck by the really wonderful charm of the simple peasant child. "Were I in his place, you should not have waited for me a single moment in vain."

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"How strangely you talk," said the girl, bashfully "if he could have come, he would certainly be here already. Perhaps indeed he is ill or — or even — dead," added she slowly, heaving a sigh from the bottom of her heart.

"And has nothing been heard of him for so long a time?"

"Not so very, very long."

"Then his home is very far from here?"

"Far? certainly—a very long distance from here," said the girl, "in Bischofsroda."

"Bischofsroda?" cried Arnold, "there I have lived now four weeks and know every child in the whole village. What is his name?"

"Henry—Henry Vollgut," said the maiden, bashfully, "son of the mayor of Bischofsroda."

"Hm," rejoined Arnold, "I have frequented the mayor's, but he is called Baüerling, for aught I know, and the name of Vollgut I have not heard in the whole village."

"You may not really know all the people there," rejoined the girl, and over the sad expression which rested on her sweet face, now stole a light subtle smile, which became her well and much better than the former melancholy.

"But from Bischofsroda one can come over the mountains very easily in two hours or at the most in three," said the young artist.

"And yet he is not here," said the girl, with a deep sigh, "although he promised me so faithfully."

"Then he will certainly come," asserted the young man confidently; "for if one has once promised you anything, he must have a heart of stone if he does not keep his word—and that your Henry certainly has not."

"No," said the girl, confidently,— but now I am going to wait no longer for him for I must be home at noon, else father scolds."

"And where is your home?"

"Just yonder in the valley—do you hear the bell? Now it will ring for divine service."

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Arnold listened, and indeed not far distant he could hear the slow strokes of a bell, but it did not sound full and deep, but sharp and discordant, and when he looked towards the place, it was almost as if a thick yellowish fog hung over that part of the valley. "Your bell has a crack in it," he laughed, "it sounds badly."

"Yes, I know well," answered the maiden, "that it does not ring sweetly, and we would have already had it recast, but time and money for it are always lacking, for there are no bell founders about here. Still what matters it, we know it at once and know what it means when it strikes—there the cracked one does as well."

"And what is your village called?"

"Germelshausen."

"And can I from yonder reach Wichtelhausen?"

"Very easily,—by the footpath over there, it is hardly a short half-hour—perhaps not quite so far if you walk fast."

"Then I will go with you through your village, dear, and if you have a good inn in the place, I will dine there."

"The inn is only too good," said the girl sighing, while she glanced back to see if the expected one was not even yet coming.

"And can an inn ever be too good?"

"Yes, for the peasant," said the girl earnestly, as she now walked slowly beside him in the hollow, "who has still much to do in the house in the evening after work, which he neglects when he sits until late at night at the inn."

"But I neglect nothing more to-day."

"Yes, with city gentlemen it is quite different, for they do not work and therefore do not neglect much; still the peasant must earn the bread for them."

"Well, not exactly so," laughed Arnold;—"cultivate, it is true, but we have to earn it ourselves, and often hard enough, for what the peasant does, he has to be well paid."

"But you do not work at all."

"And why not?"

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"Your hands do not look like it."

"Then I will show you at once what and how I can work," laughed Arnold. "Only sit down there on the flat stone under the old elder bush."

"But what shall I do there?"

"Just sit down," cried the young artist, who quickly threw off his knapsack and took out portfolio and pencil.

"But I must go home."

"I shall be ready in five minutes—I would fain take a remembrance of you with me into the world, to which your Henry himself will have nothing to object."

"A remembrance of me?—how droll you are."

"I will take your picture with me."

"You are an artist?"

"Yes."

"That is good—then you would be able to paint over newly again, the pictures in the church at Germelshausen, which look so badly faded."

"What is your name?" now asked Arnold, who meanwhile had already opened his portfolio and hurriedly sketched the girls' lovely features.

"Gertrude."

"And who is your father?"

"The mayor of the village.—Since you are an artist, you need not go to the inn; for I will take you directly home with me, and after dinner you can settle everything with father."

"About the church pictures?" laughed Arnold.

"Yes, certainly," said the girl earnestly, "and then you must remain with us a very, very long time until—our day comes again and the pictures are done."

"Well, we will speak of that later," said the young artist, using his pencil busily all the while, "but will not your Henry be angry if I am often—or very often with you, and—talk very much with you?"

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"Henry," said the maiden, "he is coming no more."

"Not to-day, to be sure, but perhaps to-morrow at that time."

"No," said Gertrude, perfectly quietly, "as he was not here at eleven o'clock, he stays away until our day is come again."

"Your day? what do you mean by that?"

The girl looked at him very gravely and seriously, but she did not answer his question, and while her gaze followed the clouds gathering high over them, it was fixed upon them with a singular expression of pain and anguish. Gertrude at this moment looked as fair as an angel, and Arnold forgot everything else, in the interest he took in the accomplishment of the portrait. Not much more time was left him. The young girl suddenly arose, and throwing a kerchief over her head to protect her from the rays of the sun, she said, "I must go, the day is so short, and they are awaiting me at home."

But Arnold had her little picture quite finished, and with a couple of bold strokes, giving the folds of the gown, he said, holding out the picture to her, "Have I drawn you well?"

"Is that I?" cried Gertrude quickly, almost startled.

"Why, who should it be?" laughed Arnold.

"And you will keep this picture and take it with you," asked the girl timidly, almost anxiously.

"Certainly I shall, "cried the young man, and then when I am far, far from here, shall think much and often of you."

"But will my father permit that?"

"My thinking of you? Can he prevent me from it?"

"No—but—that you should take that picture with you—out into the world."

"He cannot prevent it, my dearest," said Arnold, tenderly—"but would it be disagreeable to you to know that it was in my possession?"

"To me? —No!" answered the maiden, after a short reflection, "if—only—I must really ask father about it."

"You are a foolish child," laughed the young painter, "even

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a princess would have no objection to an artist's acquiring her features for himself. No harm comes to you by it. But pray don't hurry so, you wild thing; I am going with you — or will you leave me behind here without a dinner. Have you forgotten the church pictures?"

"Oh, yes, the pictures," said the maiden, stopping and waiting for him, but Arnold, who had hastily fastened his portfolio together again, was in the next instant beside her, and much more quickly than before they set forward on their way to the village. But this lay much nearer than Arnold had supposed from the sound of the cracked bell, for that which the young man had taken from afar for an alder thicket only, showed itself, as they drew nearer, to be a hedge encircled row of fruit trees, beyond which thickly settled, but surrounded on the north and northeast by wide fields, lay the old village with its lowly church tower and its soot blackened houses. Here too, they first set foot on a firm and well laid road, planted on both sides with fruit trees. But over the village hung the gloomy fog, which Arnold had already seen from afar, and obscured the clear sunlight, which could rest only with a dismal yellowish light, on the old, gray, weather beaten roofs.

But Arnold scarcely had a glance for all this, for Gertrude walking beside him, gently took his hand when they approached the houses, and holding it in hers, stepped with him into the nearest street. A wondrous sensation flashed through the hardy young fellow, at the touch of this warm hand, and almost involuntarily his glance sought that of the young girl.

But Gertrude did not look at him, fixing her eyes modestly on the ground, she led the guest toward her father's house, and Arnold's attention was at last attracted to the village people whom they met, who all passed him silently without greeting him. That particularly surprised him, for in all the neighboring villages, it would have been held almost a crime not to bid a stranger at least a "good day" or "how do you do." No one here thought

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of it, the people either passed by silently and indifferently as in a large city, or else now and then stood still and looked after them—but no one spoke to them. Even the maiden greeted no one among them all. And how strange the old houses with their pointed gables, ornamented with carved work, and their solid, weather beaten, thatched roofs looked,—and in spite of its being Sunday, no window was brightly polished, and the round panes set in lead looked dark and tarnished, and showed on their dim surface the varying hues of a rainbow. Here and there, as they passed, a lattice would open, and pleasant girl faces or old, worthy matrons would look out. The odd costume of the people also astonished him, it was essentially different from that of the neighboring villages. In addition an almost noiseless silence reigned over all, and Arnold, to whom the stillness became at last oppressive, said to his companion, "Do you then keep Sunday so strictly in your village, that the people when they meet, do not once greet each other? If, now and then, a dog was not heard to bark or a cock to crow, the whole place might be taken for lifeless and dead."

"It is noontide," said Gertrude quietly, "and so the people are not in the humor for talking, this evening you will find us somewhat noisier."

"Thank Heaven," cried Arnold, "at least there are children playing in the street—already it begins to seem very strange here to me, there in Bischofsroda, they keep Sunday very differently."

"Yonder is my father's house," said Gertrude softly.

"But," laughed Arnold, "I cannot drop in there to dinner so unexpectedly. I might come inconveniently for him, and I like to have friendly faces about me at meals. Therefore show me instead the inn, my child, or let me find it myself, for Germelshausen will be no exception to other towns. The tavern usually stands close by the church, and if one only follows the tower he cannot go far out of the way."

"You are right in that, it is just so here," said Gertrude quietly;

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"but they are already expecting us at home, and you need not fear that you will not be kindly received."

"Expecting us? Oh! you mean your Henry and yourself? Ah, Gertrude, if you would only take me in his place to-day, then I would stay here with you — as long—until you bid me go away again."

He had spoken the last words almost involuntarily in a tender tone, and gently pressed the hand which still held his fast.

Gertrude suddenly stopped, looked straight at him very seriously and said, "Do you really wish it?"

"With all my heart," cried the young artist, completely overpowered by the girl's wonderful beauty. But Gertrude said nothing further about it, and resuming her way, as if she was reflecting upon her companion's words, she at length stopped before one of the tall houses, up to which led broad stone steps guarded by iron bars, and said, again with her shy timid manner: "I live here, dear sir, and if it pleases you, come in with me to my father, who will be proud to see you at his table."

But before Arnold could reply, the mayor came out of the door on to the steps, and while a window was opened from which an old woman's pleasant face looked out and nodded to them, the peasant cried: "Why Gertrude, you have staid out long to-day, and see, see, what fine fellow is this you have brought with you?"

"My good sir—"

"But no particulars on the steps — come in, the dumpling is ready and will soon be hard and cold."

"But that is not Henry," cried the old woman from the window. Haven't I always said that he would not come back again."

"Very well, mother, very well," retorted the mayor, "this one does as well," and offering his hand to the stranger he continued: "Welcome to Germelshausen, young sir, wherever my daughter may have picked you up. And now come in to dinner, and fall to heartily—we can speak of all else afterwards. Indeed he left the young artist no further opportunity for any excuse whatever, but

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shaking his hand cordially, which Gertrude had freed as soon as he set foot on the stone steps, he took it confidently under his arm and led him into the large spacious, dwelling room.

In the house itself a damp, earthy atmosphere prevailed, and Arnold so well knew the custom of the German peasant who preferred to close his room against any fresh air and often, even in summer, lighted a fire to produce the roasting heat agreeable to him, that he was struck by it. The narrow passageway had likewise nothing attractive about it. The plaster had fallen from the walls, and seemed to have been just carelessly swept aside. The single dimmed window in the back part of it could admit hardly the necessary light, and the stairs which led to the upper story looked old and fallen to decay. However, he had but little time to observe this, for the next instant, his hospitable host threw open the door of the dwelling room and Arnold found himself in a not lofty, but wide and spacious apartment, which freshly aired, strewed with white sand, and with a large table, covered with snowy cloth in the centre, contrasted very pleasantly with the former somewhat neglected arrangement ot the house.

Besides the old woman, who had now closed the window, and drawn her chair to the table, there sat in the corner two cherry-cheeked children, and a stout peasant woman, — but in quite a different costume from that of the surrounding hamlets—had just opened the door for a servant girl coming in with a great dish.

And now the dumpling smoked on the table and all push their seats toward the welcome repast; but no one sat down, and the children gazed at their father with almost anxious looks, when Arnold appeared. The former went to his seat, rested his arm upon it and gazed downward silent and motionless, even gloomily. Was he praying? Arnold saw that his lips were pressed close together, while his right hand doubled up, hung by his side, —no sign of prayer lay in this, only obstinate yet doubtful defiance. Gertrude went softly up to him and laid her hand on

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his shoulder, and the old woman stood speechless before him, and looked at him with earnestly beseeching eyes. "Let us eat," then said the man harshly, "it is of no use"! and pulling up his chair, motioning his guest to do the same, he seated himself, seized the great ladle and served all. The whole manner of the man seemed strange to Arnold, and with the others' depressed humor, he likewise could not feel easy.

But the mayor was not the man to spoil his dinner with vexatious thoughts. As he rapped on the table the maid came in a ain bringing bottles and glasses, and with the rich old wine which he now poured out, a very different, gayer mood came over all the party at the table. Through Arnold's veins the glorious beverage flowed like liquid fire—never in his life had he tasted anything similar,—and Gertrude also drank it, and the old mother who sat close by her spinning wheel in the corner, and with a low voice sang a little song of the happy life in Germelshausen. The mayor himself was like another man. He was now as merry and careless, as he had before been serious and taciturn, and Arnold himself could not resist the influence of this rich wine. Without knowing exactly how it had happened, the mayor had taken up a violin and played a lively dance, and Arnold, his arm about the lovely Gertrude, whirled round the room so wildly with her, that he upset the chairs and spinning wheel, and ran against the maid, who was trying to take away the dishes, and played merry pranks of all kinds, that the others almost split from laughter over. Suddenly all was still in the room, and when Arnold, surprised, turned to the mayor, the latter pointed with his violin bow to the window, and then laid the instrument back again into the great wooden chest from which he had taken it. Arnold saw that in the street outside a coffin was being carried by. Six men clad in white smocks, bore it on their shoulders, and behind it walked all alone an old man, holding by the hand a fair-haired little girl. The old man walked up the street as if utterly crushed, but the little one, who

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could number scarcely four years, and of course had no suspicion who lay there in the dark coffin, nodded pleasantly, wherever she met a familiar face, and laughed brightly, when a couple of dogs raced across and one of them ran against the schoolhouse steps, and rolled over. But the quiet lasted only as long as the coffin was in sight, and Gertrude approached the young artist and said: "Now let us rest a little while. You have romped enough, and besides the heavy wine will rise still more to your head. Come, take your hat, and we will take a little walk together. When we come back, it will be time to go to the inn, for there is a dance to-night."

"A dance? — that is good," cried Arnold, delighted, "so I have come just at the right time; and you will give me the first dance Gertrude?"

"Certainly, if you wish." Arnold had already picked up his hat and portfolio. "What do you want of the book?" asked the mayor.

"He draws, father," said Gertrude,—"he has already taken my likeness. Just look at the picture." Arnold opened the portfolio and held out the picture to the man. The peasant silently examined it for a while. "And will you take that home with you," said he, at last, "and perhaps frame it and hang it up in a room?"

"And why not? May he, father?" asked Gertrude.

"If he does not stay with us," laughed the mayor, "I have nothing against it,—but behind there, something is wanting."

"What?"

"The funeral procession just passed. Draw that too on the sheet and you may take the picture with you."

"What! the funeral train by Gertrude?"

"There is plenty of room there, said the mayor obstinately, that must be thereon also, else I shall not permit you to take away my girl's portrait all alone. In such solemn company no one can think any evil of her."

Arnold smilingly shook his head over the singular proposition

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of giving the pretty maiden a funeral procession as guard of honor. But the old man seemed to have the idea fixed, and to content him he obeyed his desire. Later he could easily erase the melancholy addition. With skilful hand he produced on the paper the figures just passed, although only from memory, and the whole family pressed about him and watched with evident amazement the quick execution of the drawing.

"Have I done it well?" cried Arnold, finally, springing up from his seat and holding the picture at arm's length.

"Excellently!" nodded the mayor, "I could never have believed that you could finish it so quickly. Now let it be, and go out with my daughter and look about the village, it may not be caught sight of very soon again. But pray be here again about five o'clock—we celebrate a festival to-day and you must be present.

Arnold himself had become stupid and heavy in spirit, in the close room, with the wine in his head, and he longed for the open air, and a few minutes later, he was walking beside the lovely Gertrude, along the street which led through the village.

Now the road was no longer as quiet as before; children played on the street, the old people sat here and there before their doors and looked at them, and the whole place with its strange old buildings would have surely had a pleasant aspect, if the sun had only been able to pierce the thick brownish fog, which lay like a cloud over the roofs. "Is there a moor or a forest fire in the neighborhood?" he asked the maiden, "this fog lies over no other village, and cannot come from the chimneys."

"It is an earth mist," said Gertrude, quietly, — but have you never heard of Germelshausen?"

"Never."

"That is singular, since the village is so old—so very old."

"The houses at least look so, and even the people all have a strange demeanor and their dialect sounds very different from that of the neighboring places. You go out of your town very little, perhaps?"

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"Very little," said Gertrude.

"And is there not a single swallow here? — They can not yet have migrated?"

"Long since—the girl answered monotonously—they no longer build their nests in Germelshausen—perhaps they could not endure the earth mist."

"But you do not have it always?"

"Always."

"Then that is the cause of your fruit-trees bearing no fruit, although in Marisfeld this year, the boughs have to be propped up, so richly is the season blessed."

Gertrude made no answer to this, and strolled silently beside him, still farther through the village, until they reached the extreme end of it. Often on the way she nodded kindly to some child or spoke with one of the young girls, — perhaps about the day's dance or ball dress—a few low words. And therewith the maidens looked at the young artist with very compassionate glances, so that he, although he knew not just why was much depressed by it — but he did not dare to ask Gertrude the reason.

Now, at last they reached the very last houses, and it was here as still and lonely, yes, even deathlike, as it had now become lively in the village itself. The gardens looked as if they had not been set foot upon for long, long years; grass grew in the paths, and it seemed especially remarkable to the young stranger, that not a single fruit-tree bore any fruit. There, some men coming in from beyond, met them, and Arnold immediately recognized the returning funeral procession. The people passed silently by them, back into the village, and almost involuntarily, both turned their steps toward the church yard. Arnold now tried to cheer up his companion, who seemed to him, so very serious, told her of other places where he had been, and how it looked out into the world.

She had never seen a railroad, had not even heard of one, and

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listened attentively and astonished to his explanation. Likewise she had no suspicion of the telegraph, just as little of all the new inventions, and the young artist could not comprehend, how it was possible that in Germany men could dwell so cut off, so completely separated from the outer world, and without the slightest communication with it. During this conversation they reached the cemetery and here the antique stones and monuments astonished the young stranger, although on the whole they were so simple. "That is an old, old stone," he said, as he bent over the nearest, and with difficulty had deciphered the scroll writing on it:

"Anna Maria Berthold, *née* Stieglitz, born the 1st December 1188—died the 2nd December 1224—"

"That is my mother," said Gertrude, soberly, and two big, bright tears rose to her eyes and fell slowly down on her bodice.

"Your mother, dear child?" repeated Arnold, in surprise, "your great, great, grandmother, yes, that, it might well be."

"No," said Gertrude, "my own mother, Father has married again since, and she, at home is my stepmother."

"But doesn't that say, 'died 1224?'"

"What do I care for the year!" said Gertrude, mournfully, "it is very sad to be so parted from a mother, and yet"—she added softly and very bitterly,—"it is perhaps well,—very well that she was taken to God beforehand."

Arnold shaking his head, leaned over the stone to examine the inscription more closely, to see if the first 2 in the date of the year might not be an 8, for the ancient writing made it not improbable; but the other 2 resembled the first exactly and 1884 would not be written for a long time yet. Perhaps the stonecutter had made a mistake, and the girl was so deep in thoughts of the deceased, that he would not disturb her again by perhaps troublesome questions. He left her therefore beside the stone, by which she had knelt down and was softly praying, to examine some other monuments; but all without exception bore dates

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many hundred years back, even to 930, or 900 A.D. and he could find no more recent stone, and yet the dead were still laid here, as the last freshly made grave showed.

From the low churchyard wall, an excellent view of the old village could be had, and Arnold quickly seized the opportunity, to make a sketch of it. But over this place too, hung the strange yellowish fog, and beyond the wood he could see the sun shining clear and bright on the hillslopes. Then in the village the old cracked bell rang again, and Gertrude, jumping up quickly and shaking the tears from her eyes, motioned cheerfully to the young man to follow her. Arnold was quickly at her side.

"Now we must mourn no more," said she, smiling, "the church bell rings, and now for the dance. You have until now believed that the people of Germelshausen were mere devotees; this evening you will discover the contrary."

"But there on that side is the church door," said Arnold, "and I see no one coming out of it."

"That is very natural," laughed the maiden, "because no one goes in, not even the minister himself. The old sacristan alone gives himself no rest, and rings church in and out."

"And none of you go to church?"

"No — neither to mass—nor confession," said the girl, quietly, "we are engaged in a contest with the Pope, who lives in Italy, and he will not permit it until we obey him again."

"Why, I have heard nothing of it all my life."

"Yes, it is a long while ago," said the maiden, lightly,—"look there comes the sexton all alone out of the church, and closes the door; he does not go to the inn in the evening, but sits quietly alone at home."

"And the pastor comes?"

"I should think so—and is the merriest of all. He doesn't take it to heart."

"And why did all this happen?" said Arnold, who was almost less amazed at the facts than at the girl's ingenuousness.

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"That is a long story," returned Gertrude, "and the pastor has written it all out in a great thick book. If it amuses you and you understand Latin, you may read it therein."

"But, —" she added, warningly, —"don't speak of it when my father is by, for he does not like it. Look — there comes already the young men and maidens out of the houses, now I must hurry to reach home and dress myself, for I do not like to be the last."

"And the first dance, Gertrude?"

"I dance with you, you have my promise."

Both walked rapidly back to the village, where a very different life now reigned than in the morning. Everywhere stood laughing groups of young people; the girls were attired for the festivity, and the young men likewise in their best finery, and at the inn, which they passed, garlands of leaves hung from one window to another, and passed over the door in a wide arch of triumph. Arnold, when he saw all dressed in their best, did not wish to mingle with the merry-makers in his travelling habit, therefore in the mayor's house, he unstrapped his knapsack, took out his good attire, and had just finished his toilet when Gertrude knocked at the door and called him. And how wonderfully pretty the maiden looked in her simple, yet rich adornments, and how cordially she bade him accompany her, for father and mother were to follow later. "Longing for her Henry cannot her heart particularly break," thought the young man, indeed, as he drew her arm within his, and walked with her through the now approaching dusk to the dancing hall, but he took care not to give word to any thoughts of the kind, for a peculiar, strange feeling flashed through his breast, and his heart beat violently, as he felt that of the young girl's throb against his arm. "And tomorrow I must go away," he sighed softly to himself.

Without his intending it, the words had reached his companion's ear, and she said, smilingly, "Don't trouble yourself about that—we may perhaps remain together longer — longer than you care for."

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"And would you like it, Gertrude, if I stayed with you?" asked Arnold, and with that he felt the blood rush violently to his brow and temples.

"Certainly," said the young girl, dispassionately, "you are good and kind, — my father likes you I know, and, Henry has not yet come!" she added, softly and as if in anger.

"And if he should come to-morrow?"

"To-morrow?" said Gertrude, looking at him earnestly, with her large dark eyes,—"before that lies a long, long night. Tomorrow. You will understand to-morrow what the word means. But we will not speak of it to-day," she broke off shortly and pleasantly, "to-day is the joyful festival to which we have looked forward for so long, so very, very long, and we would not spoil it for ourselves by sad thoughts. Here we are now at the place, — the young fellows will not look cross if I bring with me a new dancer."

Arnold tried to answer her, but noisy music, which resounded from within, drowned his words. The musicians too played strange tunes—he knew not one of them and was nearly blinded in entering by the glare of the many lights which shone before him. However, Gertrude led him into the middle of the hall where a crowd of young peasant girls stood chattering together; there first she left him free to look about him a little until the dancing really began, and to become acquainted with the other fellows. At the first moment, Arnold did not feel easy among so many strange men, and the people's peculiar costume and speech restrained him, for so sweetly as these hard unaccustomed tones sounded in his ears from Gertrude's lips, so harshly sounded they from others. But the young fellows were all friendly to him, and one of them came up to him, took him by the hand and said: "That's very sensible of you, sir, to wish to remain with us — we lead a merry life, and the interval of time goes quickly enough."

"What interval," asked Arnold, less astonished at the expression than that the young man uttered so confidently his conviction that he would make this village his home.

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"You mean that I am coming back here?"

"And will you go away again?" asked the young man, quickly.

"To-morrow — yes, or day after to-morrow — but I am coming back again."

"To-morrow? So," laughed the young man — "then it's all right—well, to-morrow we will talk of it again. Now come, that I may show you our amusements, for if you would go away again to-morrow, you might not get a chance to see it."

The others laughed in their sleeves together, but the young peasant took Arnold by the hand and conducted him over the whole house, which was densely crowded with merry roving guests. First they walked through rooms in which sat card players with heaps of coin lying before them, then they found a bowling alley, which was laid out with bright shining stones. In a third room they were playing at ring-toss and other games, and the young girls ran in and out, laughing and singing, and bantered the young men, until at last a flourish from the musicians, who until then played on gaily, gave the signal for the beginning of the dance; and now Gertrude appeared at Arnold's side and seized his arm.

"Come, we must not be the last," said the lovely girl, "for as the mayor's daughter I must open the ball."

"But what a curious tune that is," said Arnold, "I can't get the time at all."

"It will be very easy," smiled Gertrude; "after the first five minutes you will find yourself in it, and I will tell you how."

Now all, except the card players, loudly rejoicing, crowded into the dance hall, and Arnold soon forgot all else in the one blissful sensation of holding in his arms the wonderfully beautiful maiden. Again and again he danced with Gertrude, and no other seemed to wish to dispute his partner with him, although the other girls flitting by, often teased him; one thing only struck and disturbed him; close by the inn stood the old church, and in the hall could be plainly heard the shrill, discordant tones of the cracked bell. But at its first stroke it was as if the dancers had

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been touched by a magician's wand. The music ceased playing in the middle of a tune, the merry, confusedly moving crowd, stood, as if fixed to their places, still and motionless, and all silently counted the solitary lingering strokes. But as soon as the last had died away the noise and merry-making went on freely again. So it was at eight, at nine, at ten o'clock, and when Arnold tried to ask the reason of so strange a conduct, Gertrude laid her finger on her lips and looked so serious and mournful, that he would not for the world have troubled her again. About ten o'clock there came a pause in the dancing, and the orchestra, which must have had lungs of iron, marched before the young people out into the dining room. There all went merrily; the wine flowed freely, and Arnold, who could not well remain behind the others, was already privately calculating what a hole this extravagant evening would make in his modest purse. But Gertrude sat near him, drank with him from the same glass, and could he then make room for such a care? And should her Henry come to-morrow!

The first stroke of the eleventh hour sounded, and again the loud mirth of the carousers was silenced, again that breathless listening to the lingering tones. A strange horror came over him; he himself knew not why, and the thought of his mother at home flashed through his heart. Slowly he raised his glass and emptied it in greeting to his distant loved ones. But at the eleventh stroke the guests sprang up from the table; the dance was to begin again and all hurried back into the hall.

"To whom did you last drink?" asked Gertrude, as she laid her arm on his again.

Arnold hesitated in answering. Would Gertrude perhaps laugh at him if he told her? But no—she had that very afternoon prayed so fervently at her own mother's grave, and in a low tone he said: "To my mother."

Gertrude answered not a word, and walked silently beside him up the stairs again—but she laughed no more, and before she joined the dance again, she asked him: "Is your mother so dear to you?"

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"Dearer than my life."

"And you to her?"

"Does not a mother love her child?"

"And if you should never go home to her again?"

"Poor mother," said Arnold, "her heart would break."

"The dancing is beginning again," cried Gertrude, quickly, "we must not delay a moment longer. And wilder than ever the dancing began, the young men, heated by the strong wine, exulted loudly, screaming and roaring, and a noise arose which threatened to drown the music. Arnold did not enjoy himself so much amid the babel, and Gertrude too had grown quiet and serious. But with all the others the noisy mirth seemed to increase, and at a pause the mayor approached them, took the young man heartily by the shoulders, and said laughing: "That's right, Mr. Artist, shake your feet merrily to-night; we have time enough to rest again. Well, Gertrude, why do you draw so long a face—is that fit for to-day's dance?—Ha! there they go again. Now I must look for my old woman, to dance the last dance with her. Now take your places, the musicians are blowing up their cheeks again!" and with a shout he pushed through the crowd of merry people. Arnold again put his arm around Gertrude for a new dance, but she suddenly freed herself from him, seized his arm and whispered softly: "Come."

Arnold had no time to ask her whither, for she glided away from him toward the hall door.

"Where are you going, Trudchen?" cried two of her playmates.

"I will be back again, immediately," sounded the short answer and a few moments later she stood with Arnold out in the fresh evening air before the house.

"Where are you going, Gertrude?"

"Come."—Again she seized his arm and led him through the village, past her father's house into which she ran and came back with a little bundle.

"What have you there?" asked Arnold, startled.

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"Come!" was all that she answered, and she walked with him by the houses until they left behind them the outermost wall round the village. So far they had followed the broad, firm, well laid out road; now Gertrude turned aside to the left of the way and walked up a small, flat hillock, from which the brightly lighted windows and doors of the inn could be just seen. Here she stood still, gave Arnold her hand and said cordially: "Greet your mother from me—farewell!"

"Gertrude," cried Arnold, amazed as well as perplexed, "will you so send me from you now in the middle of the night? Have I by any word of mine wounded you?"

"No, Arnold," said the girl, calling him by his Christian name for the first time, "just—just because I am fond of you, you must go."

"But I shall not let you go back alone in the dark to the village," begged Arnold; "maiden, you do not know how dearly I love you, how completely in these few hours you have taken possession of my heart. You know not"—

"Say nothing more," Gertrude interrupted quickly, "we will take no farewell. When the bell has struck twelve—it can be scarcely ten minutes longer—then come again to the tavern door, there I will await you."

"And until then"—

"Remain here on the spot. Promise me that you will take no step to right or left until the bell has tolled twelve."

"I promise it, Gertrude, but then"—

"Then come," said the girl, offered him her hand and turned to go.

"Gertrude," cried Arnold, in a tone of bitter anguish. Gertrude stood as if hesitating for a moment, then suddenly turned toward him, threw her arms about his neck, and Arnold felt the lovely maiden's ice-cold lips pressed close to his. But it was only for a moment, the next instant she had torn herself away, and Arnold stood, astonished at her strange behavior, but mindful of his

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promise, on the place where she left him. Now for the first time he noticed how the weather had changed in the few hours. The wind howled through the trees, the sky was covered with heavy, driving clouds, and great solitary rain drops betrayed the approaching storm. Through the dark night the lights at the inn shone out brightly, and as the wind whistled over, he could hear in solitary, interrupted blasts, the noisy sounds of the instruments, but not long. He had stood only a few minutes in his place, when there arose the strokes of the old church tower bell. At that same moment the music ceased or was drowned with the noise of the howling storm, which raged so fiercely over the slope that Arnold had to bend down to the ground not to lose his balance. There before him on the ground he felt the packet which Gertrude had taken from the house, his own knapsack and portfolio; frightened, he raised himself again.

The hour had struck, the hurricane howled past, but nowhere in the village could he discover a light. The dogs that shortly before barked and howled, were still, and a heavy damp mist rose from the ground.

"The time is up," muttered Arnold to himself, while he threw the knapsack on his back, "and I must see Gertrude once more, for I cannot thus part from her. The dance is over, the dancers will now be going home, and if the mayor will not keep me over night I will stay at the inn—moreover in the darkness I cannot find my way through the wood." Cautiously he descended the slight elevation, which he had mounted with Gertrude, to find the broad, white way, which led into the village, but he groped in vain in the bushes thereabout. The ground was wet and marshy, he sank in his thin shoes deep over his ankles, and thick alder-bushes shot up over all, where he had supposed the firm road. He could not have crossed it even in the dark, he must have felt it, when he stepped upon it, and besides that he knew that the outer wall of the village lay athwart it—this he could not mistake. But in vain he sought for it in anxious haste; the ground

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grew wetter and more marshy the further he pushed forward, the bushes thicker, and everywhere mixed with thorns, which tore his clothes and scratched his hands. Had he turned to right or left and so passed the village? He feared to wander still farther and stopped on a tolerably dry spot to wait until the bell tolled one o'clock. But it did not strike, no dog barked, no human sound was echoed to him, and with trouble and difficulty, wet through and through and shivering with cold, he worked himself back to the higher ground of the hillock, on which Gertrude had left him. It is true, from here he again twice sought to push through the thicket and find the village, but in vain, tired to death, seized with a strange horror, he at last shuns the deep, dark unfamiliar ground, and sought a protecting tree, to spend the night there. And how slowly the hours passed over him, for shivering with cold, he was not in condition to steal from the long night even a second only of sleep. Again he was ever listening through the darkness, for, ever and again, he thought he heard the harsh stroke of the bell, ever to find himself again deceived. At last the first light of dawn glimmered in the far east; the lead clouds had dispersed, the sky was once more clear and starry, and the awakening birds twittered softly in the dark trees. And broader and brighter grew the golden zone—already he could plainly see about him the tops of the trees—but in vain his glance sought the old brown church tower, and the weather beaten roofs. Nothing but wild alder bushes, with here and there solitary, stunted willows, stretched out before him. No road was to be seen, leading to right or left, no signs of any human dwelling in the neighborhood.

Brighter and brighter broke the day; the first rays of the sun fell on the wide green plain extended before him, and Arnold, not in condition to solve this riddle, wandered back a good way into the hollow. He must have, without knowing it, gone astray in the night while he sought the place, and have wandered farther from it, and was now quite determined to find it again. At last

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he reached the stone on which he had drawn Gertrude; he would have recognized the place among a thousand, for the old elder with its stiff branches pointed it out to him. He now knew whence he had come, and where Germelshausen must lie, and quickly walked back through the dale, following exactly the same direction, that he had taken yesterday with Gertrude. Yonder he recognized the bend of the slope, over which lay the gloomy fog, only the alder thicket now separated him from the first houses. Now he had reached it,—pushed through it, and found himself again in the same muddy swamp in which he had waded about the night before. Completely helpless, and distrusting his own senses, he tried to force a passage here, but the dirty boggy water at last forced him to seek dry land again, and there he wandered up and down in vain. The village had entirely disappeared. In this useless search many hours might have passed, and his weary limbs at last refused their duty. He could go no farther and must rest; of what help to him was this use less search; in the first village which he came to he could easily procure a guide to Germelshausen and then could not again mistake the way. Completely exhausted, he threw himself beneath a tree—and how his best clothes were spoiled! But that did not trouble him now, he took out his portfolio and from the portfolio Gertrude's picture, and with bitter anguish he rested his eyes on the maiden's dearly loved features, that as he found to his surprise, had already taken so firm a hold on him. Then he heard behind him the foliage rustling,—a dog barked, and as he quickly sprang up, an old hunter stood not far from him and viewed with curiosity the strange, so respectably dressed and yet so wild looking figure.

"Thank God!" cried Arnold, heartily glad to meet some human being, while he thrust the sheet hurriedly back into the portfolio. "You come, as if called, Master Forester, for I believe, I have lost my way."

"Hm, said the man, if you have lain all night here in the

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bushes—and within scarcely half an hour's distance of a good inn at Dillstedt, I should think so. Zounds, how you look, just as if you had been from head to foot in mud and thorns."

"You are intimately acquainted with the forest here?" said Arnold, who before all else wished to know where he really was.

"I should think so," laughed the hunter, striking fire and lighting his pipe again."

"What is the name of the nearest village?"

"Dillsted — just over there. If you come up on this little elevation, you can easily see it lying beneath you."

"And how far is it from here to Germelshausen?"

"Where?" cried the hunter, frightened, taking the pipe from his mouth.

"To Germelshausen."

"God protect me!" said the old man, casting a fearful glance about him, — "I know the forest well enough; but how many fathoms deep in the ground beneath the "enchanted village" lies, that God only knows—and—it has nothing to do with us."

"The enchanted village!" cried Arnold, astonished.

"Germelshausen — yes — " said the hunter, "Just there in the mud where the old willows and alders now stand, it might so and so many hundred years ago have lain, before it sank — No one knows why and wherefore, and the saying is that every hundred years on a certain day it is again raised to the light — but no Christian man would wish to come across it accidentally. — But I say, by Jove, your night's lodging in the bushes doesn't seem to have agreed with you. You look white as a sheet. There — just take a pull from this flask, it will do you good—only properly."

"Thank you."

"What, that was not half enough — a proper three-knotted swallow—so—that's the real thing, and now hurry, to get to the inn and a warm bed."

"At Dillstedt."

"Why, of course—there is none nearer."

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"And Germelhausen."

"Do me the kindness not to name that place again here, just on the spot where we stand. Let us let the dead rest, and especially those who generally have no rest and ever again appear among us unawares."

"But only yesterday the village stood here," cried Arnold, his mind scarcely capable of command,—"I was in it,—I have eaten, drank and danced in it."

The hunter viewed the young man's appearance quietly from head to foot, then he said, smiling:

"But it was called by another name, wasn't it?—probably you have just come from Dillstedt, there was a dance there yesterday evening and every one cannot bear the strong beer that the host brews now. Arnold instead of answering, opened his portfolio, and took out the drawing which he had sketched from the churchyard.

'Do you recognize the village?"

"No," said the hunter, shaking his head — there is not such a flat tower in the whole region about here."

"That is Germelhausen," cried Arnold, "and do the peasant girls in the neighhorhood dress like this girl?"

"H'm—no! what a strange funeral procession you have there." Arnold did not reply, he slipped the sheet back into his portfolio agitated by a peculiar, painful feeling.

"You cannot mistake the way to Dillstedt," said the hunter goodnaturedly, for a dark suspicion now struck him, that the stranger might not be quite right in his head—but if you wish I will accompany you, until we see the place; I shall not go much out of my way."

"Thank you," evaded Arnold. I shall easily find my way over there. So every hundred years only will the village rise to the surface?

"So they say," answered the hunter,—"but who knows whether it is true."

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Arnold had taken up his knapsack again. "May God be with you!" he said, offering the hunter his hand.

"Many thanks," answered the forrester,—"where are you going now?"

"To Dillsted."

"That's right,—just beyond the slope you will come out again on the broad highway."

Arnold turned away and walked slowly along his road. Only on top of the slope, from which he could overlook the whole hollow, he stood still once more and looked back. "Farewell, Gertrude," he murmured softly, and as he crossed over the slope, big bright tears forced themselves to his eyes.

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